65p

THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

No angels at Mons?
Message from a drowned man?
UFOs: the great cover up
Ghost of Fyvie Castle
Witches–and worse

143

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THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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In next week's issue
Rudolph Valentino is just one of the famous dead who are alleged to speak through 'direct voice' medium **Leslie Flint**; in what ways have they changed, and what can they tell us about the afterlife? In **UFO cover up** we trace the rise of the civilian organisations that sprang up to combat officialdom's wall of silence around UFOs, while in **Prester John** we examine the claims of various medieval travellers – including Marco Polo – to have found the fabulous king. Two of the most controversial mediums of the 20th century were the brothers **Willi and Rudi Schneider**; we begin with the story of Willi's psychic gifts. And in **Ghosts** we investigate the curious story of Vice-Admiral William Tryon, who was seen at a London ball by 300 people – when he was in fact drowning in the Mediterranean!
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'UFOs are bunk'

Are UFOs illusions, delusions – or alien craft? The US government set up several research projects to find the answer – but, as JENNY RANDLES reveals, the attitude of the investigators was often far from objective

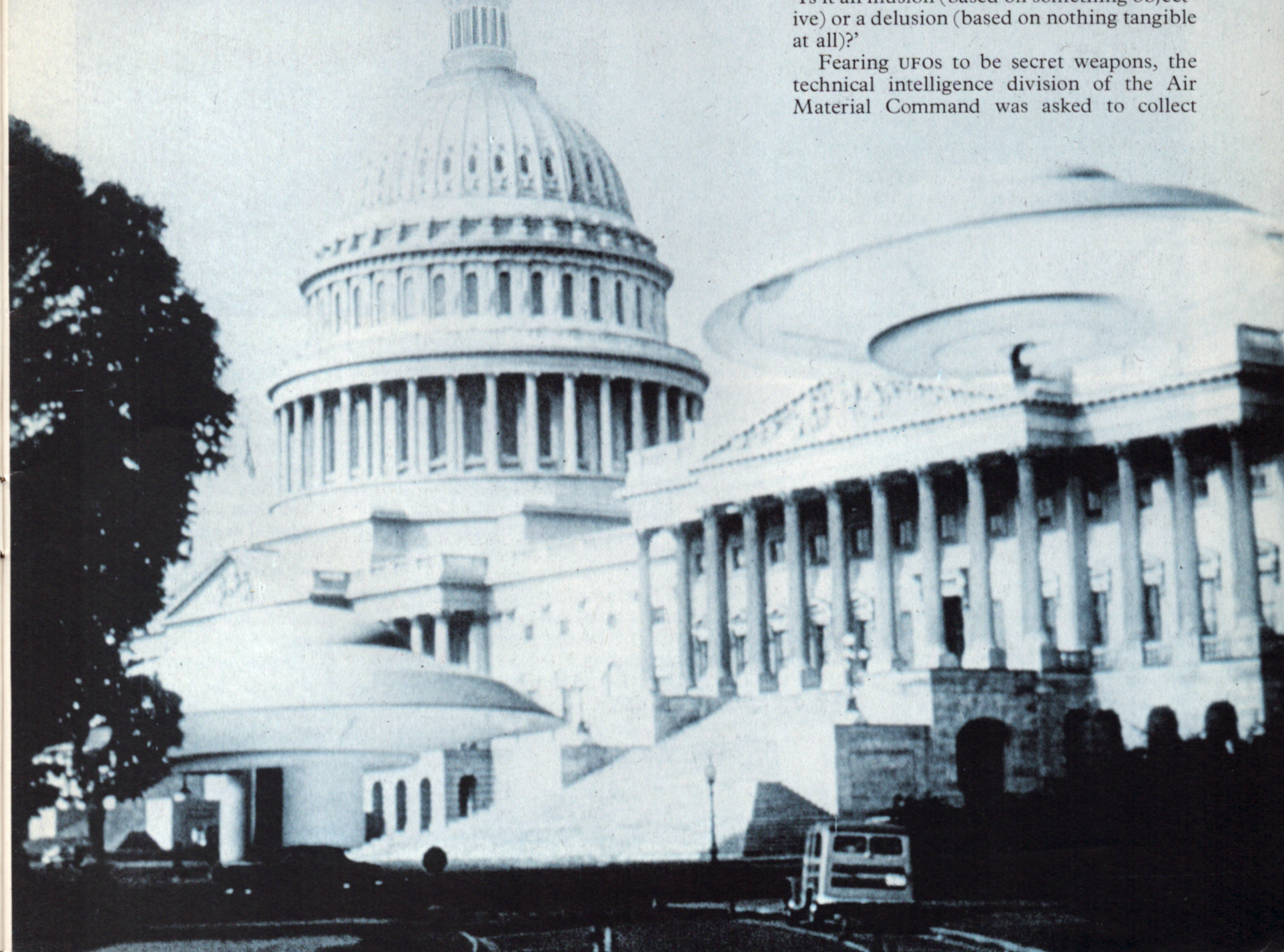
DR JACQUES VALLÉE, pioneer UFO researcher, once remarked that he had been 'struck by the fact that in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* the entry for "unidentified flying object" falls between "unicorn" and "unified field theory".' This seemed, he added, an apt location for the UFO phenomenon. It also sums up the dilemma that has faced United States governments and scientists since the 'flying saucer' mystery first came to the notice of the public in June 1947. Is it something magical, like the unicorn, or a scientific problem?

When UFO reports first began to flood in the responsibility for their investigation was handed over to the US Air Force: apparently technological devices were roaming the skies, and the origin of such devices was naturally suspect. Nobody asked: what are these phenomena? Everyone assumed they were machines, and the only question worth asking was, where did they come from?

Although reports of 'flying saucers' started coming in 1947, few people realised that reports of bizarre objects in the sky were not new. There had been the airship sightings in the US midwest in 1896 and 1897 and later in Europe, the 'Foo' fighters seen during the Second World War, and the ghost rockets in Scandinavia immediately after it. Dr C. C. Wylie, of the University of Iowa, was quick to condemn the flying saucer phenomenon as 'mass hysteria'. Columbia University's astronomer Jan Schilt said the objects were caused by 'a speeding aircraft churning up the atmosphere and disturbing the light rays'. And one of the first theories tested by the USAF was that the 'saucers' were gliding hailstones!

The public joined in a UFO jamboree, buying 'UFO' souvenirs and hoax discs to place in neighbours' gardens. But an opinion poll in August 1947 showed that most people believed that UFOs were simply misidentified everyday objects; virtually nobody thought they came from outer space. One psychologist summed up the mood of the day by saying that the only question remaining was: 'Is it an illusion (based on something objective) or a delusion (based on nothing tangible at all)?'

Fearing UFOs to be secret weapons, the technical intelligence division of the Air Material Command was asked to collect



A UFO looms menacingly over the Capitol building in Washington DC, in a scene from the 1950s movie *Earth versus the flying saucers*. This was based on several magazine articles by Major Donald Keyhoe claiming that the US Air Force had deliberately misled the public by explaining away all reports of UFOs as misidentified mundane objects, such as weather balloons. But UFOs, said Keyhoe, were real – and possibly deadly

reports at Wright Field (later Wright-Patterson Air Force Base) in Dayton, Ohio.

On 23 September 1947 (just three months into the UFO 'craze') Lieutenant-General Nathan F. Twining, the AMC Commander, wrote to the commanding officer of the US Army Air Force saying: 'The phenomenon reported is something real and not visionary or fictitious. . . .' He recommended a full-scale investigation. So, as the world laughed, the USAF issued its orders, and Project Sign came into being during January 1948.

It is worth noting that for many years the USAF denied the existence of Twining's letter with its unequivocal stance – just one of many instances in which they suppressed sensitive documents that went against the official line that UFOs did not exist.

Sign of the times?

By mid 1948 Sign had rejected the secret weapons hypothesis. Yet UFOs continued to display unquestionable evidence of being physical craft. This created two schools of thought. One said that all UFOs were real, but only in the sense that they were misidentified. The other argued that the objects were alien in origin. The alien hypothesis was undoubtedly the most popular, and Sign's 'estimate of situation' report favoured the alien theory. Chief of Staff General Hoyt S. Vandenberg responded by classifying the report as 'top secret'. It was rejected by the USAF and shortly afterwards it was destroyed.

The rebuff had a demoralising effect on the staff of Project Sign. However, they continued to check out UFO reports, using advanced techniques and employing scientific consultants. Their final report in February 1949 recorded that 20 per cent of the cases reported to them remained unexplained; and they recommended an intensified full-time USAF study into the UFO question.

Project Grudge (Sign's aptly named successor) aimed to eliminate the troublesome problem of UFOs. Positive support was offered to any journalist willing to write an article proclaiming UFOs as nonsense.

This was an extraordinary change in policy. Scarcely a year separated the Sign report – which had promoted the alien theory – and the final report of Project Grudge (August 1949), which recommended that UFO study should be greatly downgraded. In fact Grudge had actually received 23 per cent more reports than Sign – but had dismissed them all as being 'psychological'.

But was the Sign report really ignored at high level? Or was it secretly acted upon? There are many who regard the events of the year between Sign's report and the closure of Grudge as inexplicable, except that the possibility of the UFOs' alien origin was taken so seriously that responsibility for UFO study was given top level rating – with Grudge and its successors merely acting as puppets, or public relation fronts.

When Grudge was shut down in 1950 a highly secret study called Project Twinkle began. This set out to investigate reports of curious green fireballs seen in New Mexico. Scientific observation posts were set up where most fireballs had been seen. But the phenomenon moved elsewhere. When the investigators followed, the UFOs moved again. One or two scientists asked for funds to investigate this odd behaviour, but they were turned down, and Twinkle ceased operations. However, green fireballs of the same type continue to be seen throughout the world. In May 1978 a former Royal Air Force pilot reported seeing three of them whizz past his car at Lymm, Cheshire.

The era of allegations of 'cover ups' dawned. The USAF pursued a policy of explaining away the phenomenon at all costs. Later the purpose was said to be the ultimate eradication of the UFO problem by gradually playing down its significance. And this may make sense. For if UFOs were seen not to be a defence threat then why should the USAF worry about them – whatever they were? But even so, this behaviour fanned the fires of suspicion.

Donald Keyhoe, a retired Marine Corps Major, was the principal motivator of public belief in the cover up. He cited instances such as the death of Captain Thomas Mantell, killed in his aircraft while climbing to chase a UFO above Godman Air Force Base in Kentucky. It seems that Mantell was in pursuit of a secret US Navy weather balloon that had strayed into the area, but nobody told the Air Force about this until the balloon was declassified years later. Desperate for an answer – any answer – to squash the idea that

The 1950s saw various manifestations of public interest in flying saucers – not all of them serious. Strange discs were discovered in gardens or on farms (top) all over the United States, although they originated in workshops and garden sheds rather than some far-distant planet. And voicing the growing suspicions of many, the London Aetherius Society held a rally (above) in 1958 to draw attention to the government's alleged UFO cover up

The curious phenomenon of green fireballs (below) has been reported all over the world. Three emerald-green objects were seen by Mr Gerry Mitchell, a former RAF pilot, in May 1978, moving over the Shell Chemicals plant (bottom) near Lymm, Cheshire, England. When the USAF's Project Twinkle investigated a similar phenomenon in New Mexico in 1950 they noticed that wherever they set up their equipment, the UFOs moved to another location, suggesting that they possessed – or were guided by – some form of intelligence

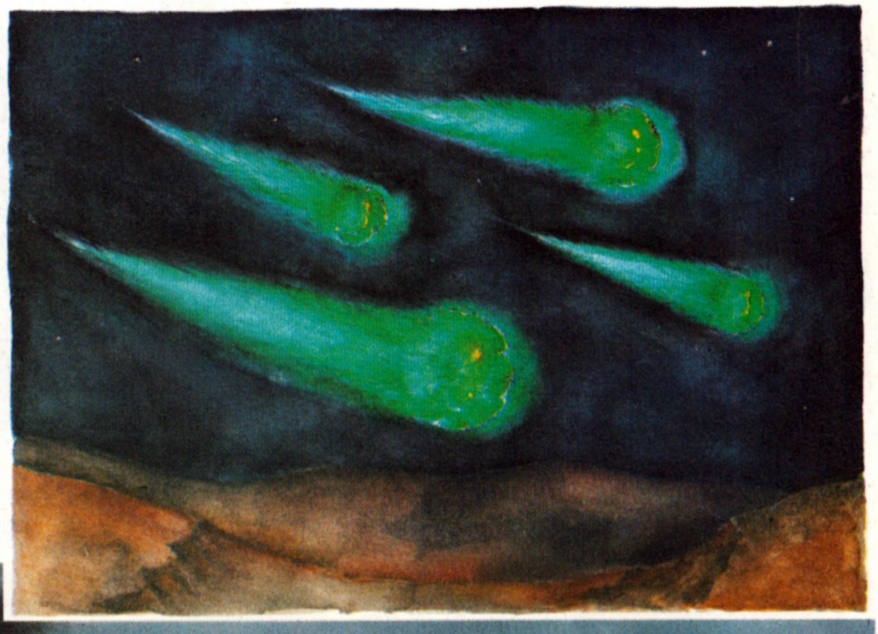
Mantell had been shot down by an alien 'death-ray', the USAF claimed that Mantell had been chasing Venus – an explanation so inadequate that Keyhoe had no difficulty in persuading the press that the Air Force was covering up the truth.

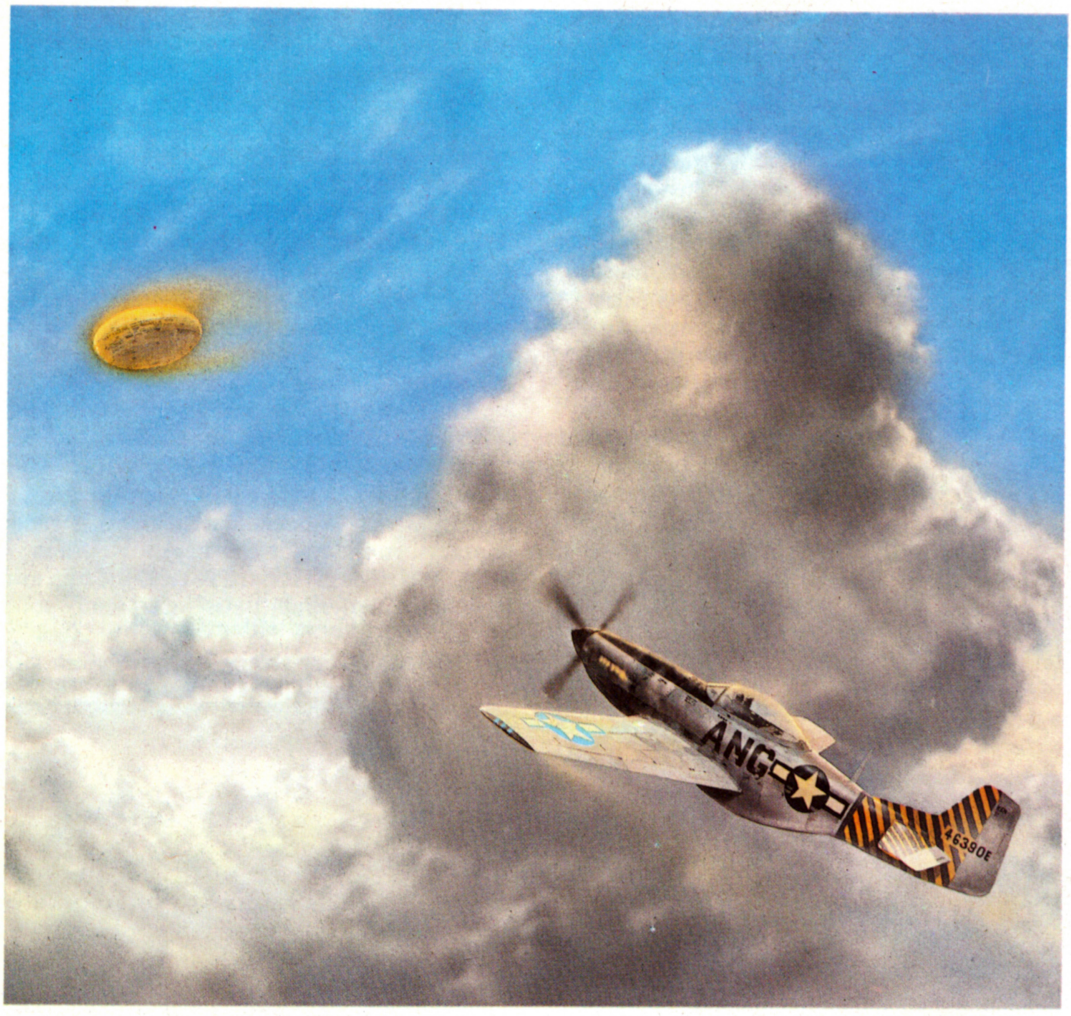
Keyhoe launched his attack on the USAF's official UFO policy in the January 1950 issue of *True* magazine, with a story that rapidly became a sensation and stimulated a string of books, one of which was turned into a classic science-fiction movie, *Earth versus the flying saucers*. In 1957 he formed the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP) to continue the fight against what he considered to be an obvious cover up by the Air Force. But if there was a cover up, it was probably at a much higher level. Project Blue Book, the last USAF project after Grudge, may also have been ignorant of the truth.

The first chief of Project Blue Book was intelligence officer Captain Edward J. Ruppelt. He was the only Air Force officer who openly admitted that he took UFOs very seriously. In his brief time at the helm he adopted new techniques and appointed proper scientific staff, including Dr J. Allen Hynek as chief scientific adviser. He proposed cost-effective scientific experiments intended to discover the truth once and for all, and often paid his own expenses to investigate interesting cases.

And most of them were very interesting: those he studied during 1952 and 1953 were frankly astonishing. In 1956 he published a book called *The report on unidentified flying objects*, which is packed with tales of radar contacts, military jet chases, movie films of UFOs, and so on. It is hard to read the text and not conclude that UFOs are real, solid phenomena.

This was a very strange state of affairs. In





Left: an artist's impression of Captain Thomas Mantell's fatal encounter with a UFO above the Godman Air Force Base in Kentucky in 1948. Mantell's aircraft crashed when he climbed to chase the UFO – which the USAF claimed was the planet Venus. Major Keyhoe used this incident to persuade the public that there was an official cover up, and such was the prevailing mood that he had little difficulty in doing so. Mantell's 'UFO', however, seems to have been a US Navy weather balloon, which in some light and from some angles looks like a classic disc-shaped UFO (below)

1953 the official USAF line was still that UFOs were not of interest. But here was Ruppelt, the head of their own study group, publishing a book that not only stated otherwise but emphasised their significance.

Given what occurred after the Project Sign report, it is hardly surprising to learn that Ruppelt left the Air Force in 1953, very disillusioned at the official line on UFOs that his superiors expected him to convey to the public. In fact, he modified some of his more extreme statements in later editions of his book, possibly under official pressure. He died in 1960.

Until it was closed down in 1969 Project Blue Book continued to 'explain away' the UFO phenomenon.

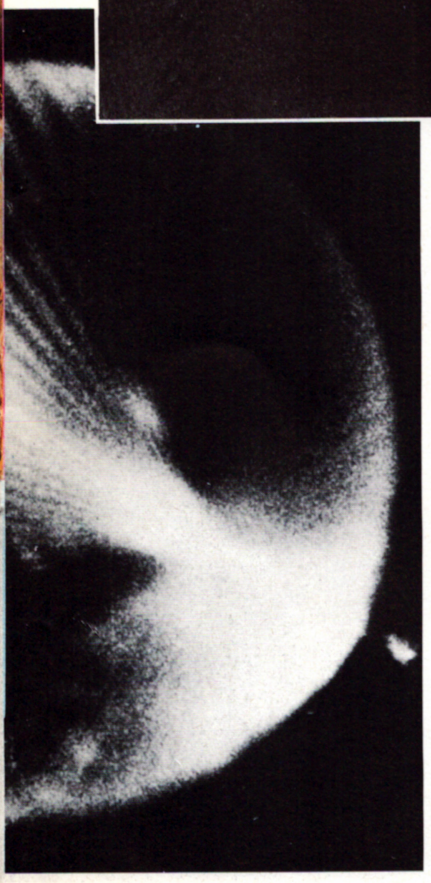
The turning point in UFO history may well have come in January 1953 when the CIA ordered the convening of the Robertson Panel, an élite team of scientists who were to carry out yet another secret study of UFOs. They spent a mere four days looking at the best available evidence and gave their report on the basis of CIA fears that a hostile country might use UFO panics as cover for an invasion. Some of the panel's recommendations (declassified much later) included surveillance of civilian UFO groups to watch for enemy infiltration, enlisting psychologists – and perhaps even cartoonists – to make UFOs appear ludicrous, and a wholesale, cold-blooded, debunking of cases. The USAF complied with some of these ideas enthusiastically. And later in 1953 it was even made an offence under the Espionage Act to release official UFO reports. This clamp-down did not apply only to military personnel but to anyone who knew about the anti-UFO propaganda campaign.

Another CIA denial

We can only guess at what effect the Robertson Panel had on serious UFO research. For although the CIA continued to deny that they had ever been interested in UFOs, we now know that they were extremely interested in them even before 1953 (see page 1041).

The decade that followed this epic meeting of the Robertson Panel saw the rise of independent UFO research groups, most of which firmly believed that the USAF were deliberately withholding the truth. But the staff of Blue Book seem, in retrospect, to have been merely pawns. Several times they made efforts to pass on their UFO files to a more scientific body such as NASA, having recognised that UFOs were not a defence threat, but if anything worthy of proper scientific investigation. However, ironically, their own debunking methods had been so successful that no scientific group would

Right: Frank Ryman, a US Coast Guard, who took a photograph of a UFO (below) flying over Seattle, Washington, in May 1947, at the height of the first modern UFO craze. In September of that year Project Sign – the USAF's official UFO research project – came into being and rapidly favoured the alien hypothesis. Yet only two years later its successor, Project Grudge, was set up with the aim of discrediting the very idea of UFOs



associate itself with UFOs, leaving Blue Book with a phenomenon they had no inclination to deal with and no facilities to handle.

With a new wave of UFO sightings in 1965, the USAF seized upon a suggestion by J. Allen Hynek that a scientific panel be convened to study the phenomenon; the panel first met in February 1966 under the directorship of Dr Brian O'Brien.

The O'Brien commission did not find any evidence of a defence threat but did recommend that selected universities examine 100 UFO cases each year, devoting 10 working days to each case. Each team, it was suggested, should include a psychologist, a physical scientist and an astronomer. They also urged Blue Book to make its files available to Congress and other 'public persons' to remove all suspicion of a cover up.

Within two months Congressman Gerald Ford, later US president, succeeded in establishing open Congress hearings at which the O'Brien recommendations were publicly urged onto the Air Force. This time there was no fight. They were adopted – all but for the release of the files.

This led to one of the strangest and saddest tales in the history of UFO study: that of the Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects undertaken by Colorado University for the USAF Office of Aerospace Research. The famous physicist Dr Edward U. Condon was asked to lead its two-year study. How those years – and the $500,000 grant – were spent created an undying controversy. From the outset Condon and his chief administrator Robert J. Low openly declared their disbelief in UFOs. When Low was asked to visit European ufologists – during a scheduled visit to attend a conference – he refused to do so and went to Loch Ness instead. As he put it, neither UFOs nor the monster existed, but it was interesting to compare the two phenomena.

A thousand times 'No'!

The negative findings of the 1000-page Condon Report, published in 1969, gave the USAF the opportunity to wash their hands of the whole UFO business – in public at least.

Fortunately, most readers of the report realised that Condon's negative conclusions simply did not tie in with the fact that one third of the cases his team investigated defied explanation. The report had some indirect results: several scientists became interested in the UFO phenomenon, and Dr Hynek, free of his Air Force commitments, went on to form the first science-based UFO group, the Center for UFO Studies, in 1973.

Pressure on the USAF to make their files public continued. Members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, including Carl Sagan, Thornton Page and other scientists who were not convinced of the reality of UFOs, signed a petition requesting that the files be made open to scientists. Despite the impressive list of signatories it was turned down. Only when the new Freedom of Information Act became law in 1976 did the USAF finally give way.

Certainly these files reveal the incompetence of the USAF work. The standards of investigation of many civilian UFO groups were much higher. But the USAF's brief was only to investigate the threat to defence posed by UFOs – not to enquire into their essential nature. The release of previously classified information also brought to light many documents whose existence had previously been denied.

This fact, plus the lever of the new act, led to a decision by some ufologists to find out what else had gone on under cover. What part had the CIA – and other state security agencies – played?

As for the Condon Report files, they never were released. Dr Condon went to his grave insisting that UFOs were 'bunk' and calling all those who believed in them 'kooks'. He burnt all the records.

On page 2866: the battle for information continues – in Europe as well as the USA

If the Germans were devils, as most British believed in the First World War, it was only natural that angelic assistance against them should be needed. MELVIN HARRIS traces the psychological origins of 'angels' rumours

THE STORY OF THE ANGELS that helped the British at the battle of Mons gained authority from the name of Miss Marrable (see page 2829). Then it received further convincing support from the testimony of Private 10515 Cleaver of the 1st Cheshire Regiment. He asserted that there had indeed been supernatural intervention and it had saved the British troops from annihilation. And there was no questioning this, for he had *been* at Mons himself and *seen* the vision of Angels. He swore an affidavit to this effect before George S. Hazelhurst, a Justice of the Peace, of the county of Flint in Wales.

This sworn and confident statement was seized on by the press: 'striking confirmation', *Light* called it. The writer Harold Begbie agreed and triumphantly flourished it in his book *On the side of the angels*. But his triumph was to prove short-lived.

Unfortunately for all concerned, George Hazelhurst picked up some rumours concerning Private Cleaver. This led to enquiries at the headquarters of the Cheshires. And there, the major in charge of the records turned up details showing that Cleaver had in fact been in England during the battle of Mons and the subsequent retreat!

Hazelhurst broke the news in a crestfallen letter to the *Daily Mail*. And he ended with the sad plea: 'Will none of the officers who were at Mons and saw the Angels of whom Miss Marrable speaks come forward and confess it?'

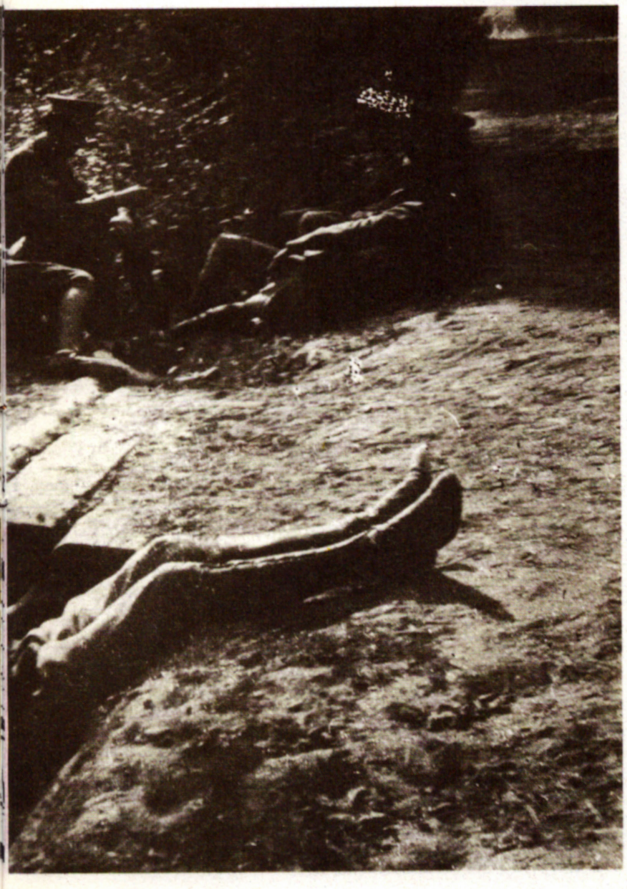
His plea was never to be answered – and Miss Marrable herself explained why. In a letter to the *Evening News* she revealed that she knew *nothing at all* about any supernatural episodes during the retreat from Mons. Those stories, using her good name, were nothing but fabrications.

Despite these exposures 'Miss Marrable's testimony' continued to circulate – often with her name left out. And Private Cleaver's lying affidavit was still being reprinted eight months after it was discredited. But in September 1915, such exposures made Begbie's 'powerful defence' of the angels story look somewhat dubious.

It is true that Begbie had other testimonies – but most were third-, fourth- and even sixth-hand statements. A number of them were patently absurd. And most led

Above: a plump warrior angel with a host of bowmen hovers over advancing grey hordes at Mons. This picture adorned the sheet music for the *Angel of Mons* waltz, an enterprising wartime attempt to cash in on the legend of the angels

Above: cover illustration from *The broken soldier and the Maid of France*, a novel by Henry Van Dyke published in 1919. Its theme of a French soldier who loses his courage but regains it with the aid of a vision of Joan of Arc was clearly inspired by certain versions of the rumours from Mons



Left: exhausted men of the 11th Hussars rest in the Forest of Ermenonville during the retreat from Mons. Thousands of Allied soldiers took part in the retreat – yet few first-hand accounts of the angels were ever produced, and none survived scrutiny

back to witnesses who were untraceable. In fact there was only one body of evidence worth considering: the impressive statements of a young girl, nurse Phyllis Campbell, as featured in *The Occult Review*.

Now Miss Campbell was no ordinary nurse. For one thing she was highly articulate. Her mother was a novelist, while her aunt was Lady Archibald Campbell – also a writer. So she came from an imaginative family.

When the slaughter began Miss Campbell was living in France. She immediately volunteered as a nurse, took a quick course and began work at a dressing station at one of the railway halts in the forest of Marley. And there she met the men who had 'met the angels'.

There was the Lancashire Fusilier who had seen St George on horseback, leading the British. There was the Royal Field Artilleryman who declared:

> It's true, Sister. . . . We all saw it . . . a tall man in golden armour on a white horse, holding his sword up. . . . Then before you could say 'knife' the Germans had turned, and we were after them. . . . We had a few scores to settle and we fairly settled them.

Then there were the two officers and three men of the Irish Guards who told her roughly the same story.

'The very best of sources'

So Phyllis Campbell presented testimony that differed markedly from that offered by everyone else. For she was reporting first-hand accounts. In truth, she seemed to know more about the apparitions than anyone else anywhere. She even added to her claims by asserting that the French soldiers had seen Joan of Arc. Said one: 'I know her well, for I am of Domrémy. I saw her brandishing her sword and crying, "Turn! Turn! Advance!" . . . No wonder the Boches fled down the hill.'

Phyllis Campbell's knowledge did not end there. She further stated that St Michael had also appeared, frequently, during the battles on the Russian front. Her Russian knowledge naturally came from the very best of sources: from a letter 'received by her friends in France before September 14, 1914' and written by, of all people – a Russian princess.

Clearly Miss Campbell is the key figure in the whole affair and deserves a very close scrutiny. Such a scrutiny shows that she was no stranger to occult fancies. Her influential aunt, Lady Archibald Campbell, turns out to have been a noted clairvoyant and medium, who believed in fairies. Just before the outbreak of war, Phyllis herself, under the name of 'Phil Campbell', had written two articles on French ghost stories for *The Occult Review*. So she had a lively imagination, fired by psychic teachings.

She also had a very strange view of evidence. When challenged by Arthur

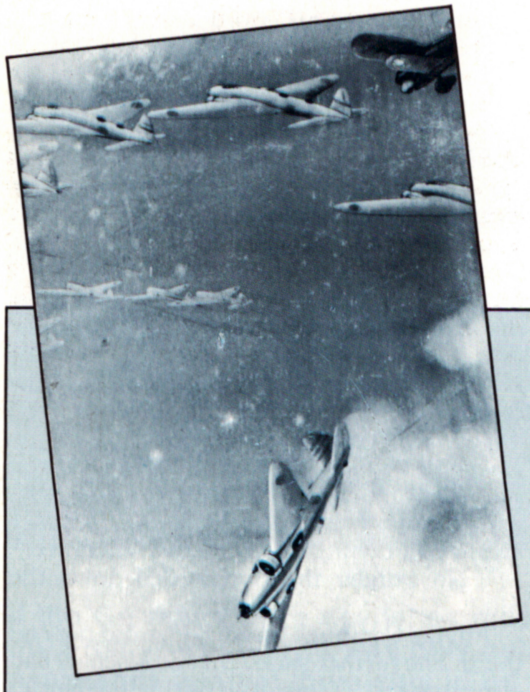
Machen to produce first-hand confirmations of her claims, she countered by saying that the troops were forbidden to talk about the events – which was an outright lie. Then she fielded the following quotation as proof. It was part of a young officer's letter, quoted in Mabel Collins's *The crucible*:

> I had the most amazing hallucinations marching at night, so I was fast asleep, I think. Everyone was reeling about the road and seeing things too, they said . . . marched on for the rest of the night. . . . Most tiring; I again saw all sorts of things, enormous men walking towards me, and lights and chairs and things in the road.

And this passage was in Miss Campbell's view one in the eye for Machen! Yet, if anything, it showed the real weakness of her case. When put to the test she had offered nothing but a letter that described the hallucinations suffered by battle-fatigued soldiers. Such visions were common on forced marches on many fronts. Compare that letter with the following – a report from the South-West Africa campaign of 1915:

> The fatigue became awful. I began to get light-headed. The sky seemed to become a straight wall in front of us, and the effect of the moonlight through the dust made me imagine I saw great palaces and churches, with the stars as little windows. Then I would pull

British volunteer nurses in France are inspected by Queen Mary. They served with a courage and devotion that was the equal of the soldiers'. One of the nurses who served in France was Phyllis Campbell. When she reported the visions of angels seen by fighting men and the atrocities committed by Germans, she was heard with the respect due to a heroine



Bombs away

The angels apparently returned in 1940 to intervene in another human conflict – this time the Sino-Japanese war. Fittingly enough, they now appeared in an anti-aircraft role. The story appeared in *The United Church Record*, and was retold in *The New Church Herald*, a Swedenborgian publication, by Mr Hector Waylen. The story should, he thought, 'cheer us in these times of trial'. It was given further currency in *Light*, a periodical devoted to psychic matters.

Dr Charles Kimber, a missionary in China, was said to have received two letters in the same mail: one from a Japanese, the other from a Chinese. The first told of a young Japanese airman who had been ordered to lead 10 bombers against a Chinese city. Such attacks (left) normally met little opposition. But this time the leader saw a 'multitude of angels with drawn swords, blocking the way'. Supposing them to be odd cloud formations he flew on, but found himself 'unable to pass them'. (The accounts are too vague to describe just how his aircraft behaved at that point.) 'The barrier proved so strong that he turned about and his squadron followed him.' He was allegedly executed for disobedience.

Remarkably, the second letter, from the Chinese, described the same incident – from the point of view of the people on the ground. There had been panic when they had heard that the bombers were on their way. 'A Chinese pastor had fallen upon his knees and prayed that God would somehow hinder the planes from coming.' He prayed until he saw the squadron approach. 'Then suddenly he saw the leader irresolutely swerve from his course, as if beaten back, and turning round, he flew away, followed by the other nine airmen.' Mr Waylen added that he had collected many such accounts and confidently asserted that 'invisible barriers . . . can be formed, effectually preventing persons, in the flesh, from passing. . . .'

Below: a field hospital for Australian soldiers, set up in a French château. It might not have been surprising if stories of visions had originated among soldiers subject to the dangers, hardships and injury of combat – but, oddly, it does not seem to have been there that they began. And certainly it was at home, in the tranquillity of Britain, that the rumours were avidly seized upon and amplified

> myself together, and look at the men riding in front, and they would turn into funny old giantesses dancing. . . .

In clashing with Machen, Miss Campbell escaped the drubbing she had invited; Machen was hampered by his chivalrous outlook and he held back. So she continued to shine as the leading light among the 'divine interventionists'. Indeed, she promised that 'evidence exists . . . and when the war is over and when the embargo of silence is removed, Mr Machen will be overwhelmed with corroborative evidence.' Having said that, Miss Campbell apparently changed her mind, for there was talk of a book to be written by her, providing all the answers.

That particular book never appeared – not even when the war was over. But another book of hers came out called *Back of the front*, and it proves to be a revelation. It gives dramatic insight into her mind. It shows that she was driven by a fanatical patriotism, which led her to accept and repeat every atrocity story that came her way. At no time did she bother to check on the truth of these tales. What is more, for every atrocity tale that circulated, Miss Campbell had one better. She actually claimed to have *seen* these atrocities for herself.

The atrocity-mongers had shrieked that Belgian women were having their breasts cut off by the Huns. Miss Campbell confirmed this:

> In one wagon, sitting on the floor was a naked girl of about 23. One of her suffering sisters, more fortunate than the rest in possessing an undergarment, had torn it in half and covered the front of her poor body. It was saturated with blood from her cut-off breasts. On her knees lay a little baby, dead.

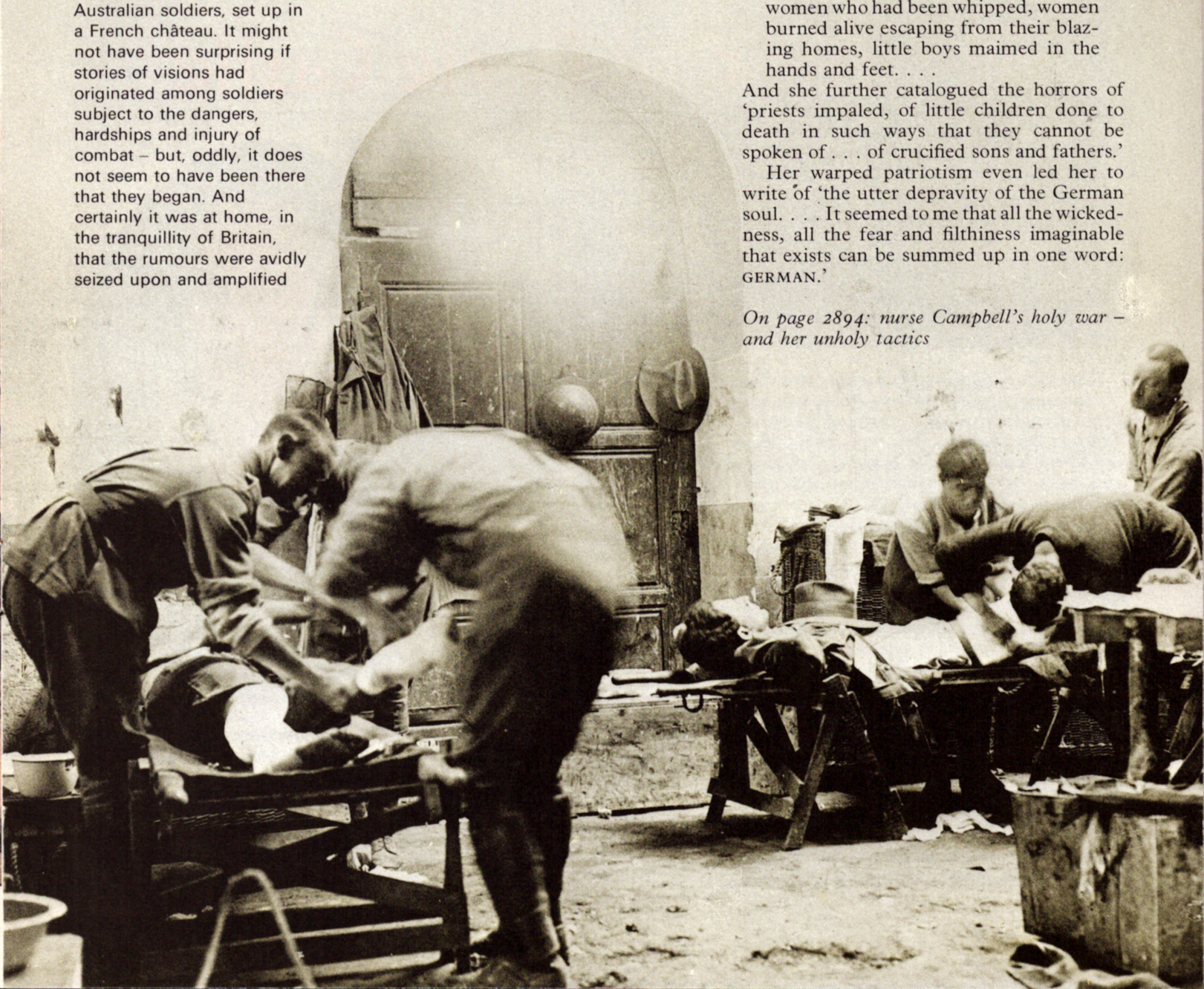
Then it was said that the Huns cut off the hands and feet of children, tortured women, burned people alive and impaled and crucified civilians – including priests. Phyllis Campbell 'knew all this to be true'. In one railway wagon she saw:

> women covered with sabre cuts, women who had been whipped, women burned alive escaping from their blazing homes, little boys maimed in the hands and feet. . . .

And she further catalogued the horrors of 'priests impaled, of little children done to death in such ways that they cannot be spoken of . . . of crucified sons and fathers.'

Her warped patriotism even led her to write of 'the utter depravity of the German soul. . . . It seemed to me that all the wickedness, all the fear and filthiness imaginable that exists can be summed up in one word: GERMAN.'

On page 2894: nurse Campbell's holy war – and her unholy tactics



The curse of Fyvie Castle

An ancient curse laid on Fyvie Castle in Scotland is said to be still effective today. FRANK SMYTH reports on this macabre legend, and the melancholy ghost of the 'Green Lady' that haunts the great staircase, portending death

ALEXANDER FORBES-LEITH bought Fyvie Castle in 1889. With it, he acquired both a curse and perhaps the only ghost that has ever signed its name in stone for later generations to see.

The castle, which stands some 30 miles (50 kilometres) north-west of Aberdeen, has been described as the 'crowning glory of Scottish baronial architecture'. Its foundations were laid before the Norman Conquest and, since the 14th century, it has been held by only five great families.

Like many a blight on old Scottish families, the 'Fyvie curse' was the work of the ubiquitous Thomas the Rhymer. Although he was shrouded in legend and superstition, Thomas of Erceldoune seems certain to have been a real person. He was born in 1220 and mentioned as witness to a deed at the Abbey of Melrose around 1240; in Peter Langtoft's early 14th-century *Chronicle* he is stated to have been a poet.

In his own day Thomas the Rhymer was widely credited as being the lover of the Queen of Elfland. It was she who had given him the power of prophecy, and when he vanished without trace it was presumed that she had carried him off. It is more likely that he entered a monastery or, as Sir Walter Scott believed, was murdered by robbers.

The magnificent south front of Fyvie Castle (above) was extensively rebuilt in the early 16th century by Alexander Seton, Lord Fyvie (right). According to legend, three 'weeping stones' of ill omen had been built into the earlier fabric of the castle; as long as they remained there, no heir would be born within the castle's walls

When he was alive, however, his travels were well-recorded both in local lore and in contemporary documents. He cannot have been a welcome guest, since his prophecies invariably foretold disaster; bloodshed and general mayhem were his stock in trade. Nevertheless, few of the lairds Thomas the Rhymer visited cared to turn him away in

case even worse befell them.

According to James Murray, the 19th-century editor of the five ancient manuscripts that tell Thomas's story, the gates of Fyvie Castle had stood 'wall-wide' for seven years and a day, awaiting his inevitable arrival. When he finally turned up it was in a typically ostentatious style:

> He suddenly appeared before the fair building, accompanied by a violent storm of wind and rain, which stripped the surrounding trees of their leaves and shut the Castle gates with a loud crash. But while the tempest was raging on all sides, it was observed that, close to the spot where the Tammas stood, there was not wind enough to shake a pile of grass or a hair of his beard.

Not surprisingly, after such a dramatic entry Thomas had to deliver an equally blood-curdling prophecy:

> Fyvie, Fyvie, thou's never thrive
> As lang's there's in thee stanis [stones] three.
> There's ane intill [one in] the oldest tower,
> There's ane intill the ladye's bower,
> There's ane intill the water-yett [water gate]
> And thir three stanes ye's never get.

This somewhat obscure pronouncement was taken to mean that three stones, known as the weeping stones, which had originally been taken from a nearby church property, would act as evil omens to Fyvie as long as they remained part of the building. Only one of the stones, the one originally in 'the ladye's bower', has been found. Today it stands in a wooden bowl in the charter room; at times it is bone dry and at others 'exuding sufficient water to fill the bowl'. The stone purported to be beneath the 'water-yett' has never been located; the third one may have been built into what is now the Preston Tower since once, records an ancient document at the castle, 'when the rightful but dispossessed heir to the property approached the water gushed forth in mournful salutation.'

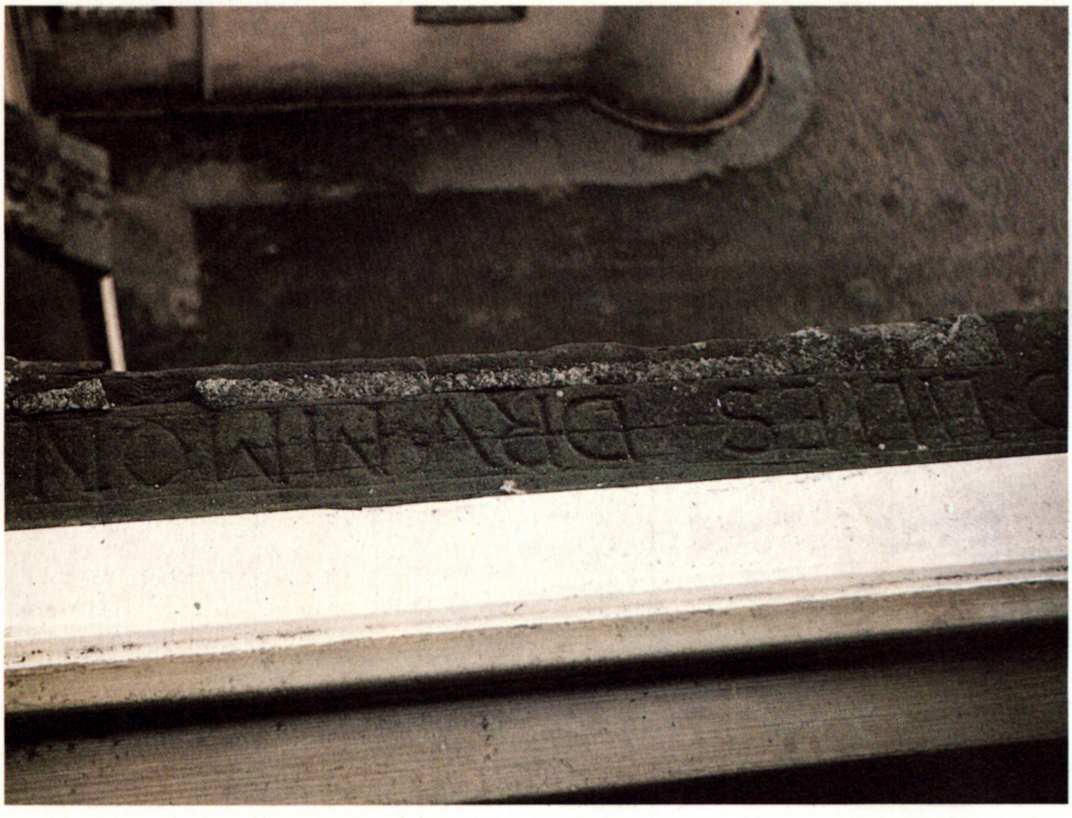
Above right: the Seton tower over the main gate, which was being rebuilt by Lord Fyvie when he married his second wife in 1601. Because the new apartments in it were not ready for occupation, the couple spent their wedding night in a room in the older part of the castle

Above: the panelled charter room, decorated with crescents, cinquefoils and the arms of the Seton family, was another of Lord Fyvie's improvements to the castle. The only one of the three 'weeping stones' that has been located is reputedly kept in a wooden bowl in this room

Although Thomas the Rhymer was far from specific, the actual nature of the curse was interpreted as meaning that no heir would ever be born in the castle, and this is said to have been true since 1433. Furthermore, the castle would never pass from a father to his eldest son; again this claim has held good. Indeed, the tradition looks set to continue since the present owner put Fyvie on the market in 1982.

But there is another mystery surrounding Fyvie. It too concerns a stone, one that is situated immediately above the charter room; it forms a window sill three storeys up the sheer face of the castle wall. The puzzle, which dates from the night of 27 October 1601, has so far defied any rational explanation. At that time the laird was Alexander Seton, Lord Fyvie, afterwards first Earl of Dunfermline, and Lord President of the Scottish sessions.

In 1592 Seton married Dame Lilias (or Lilies) Drummond, daughter of Lord



Left: the stone window sill with the name of Lord Fyvie's first wife, D. LILIES DRUMMOND, carved upside down in characters nearly 3 inches (7 centimetres) high. The room is said to be the one occupied by Lord Fyvie and his second wife on their wedding night; during the night they heard deep sighs, and in the morning they discovered Dame Lilias's name incised outside the window

Patrick Drummond, another peer connected to the ruling house of Stuart. Dame Lilias was a handsome, happy woman and for nine years she and her husband were contented together. In that time she bore five daughters, four of whom survived to marry influential noblemen. However, Lilias was not as strong as her appearance suggested; on 8 May 1601 she died at her husband's house in Fife and was buried there.

The merry widower

Dame Lilias was not quite 30 when she died. According to the historical record, Seton seems to have mourned her death, and the fact that he remained on good terms with his brother-in-law seems to bear this out. Tradition, on the other hand, asserts something quite different: tired of waiting for the son and heir who never came, Seton had begun an affair with the beautiful Lady Grizel Leslie, young daughter of the Master of Rothes, whose home was 20 miles (32 kilometres) from Fyvie; Dame Lilias died of a broken heart.

Although history and hearsay would appear to part company in their accounts of Seton's behaviour immediately after his wife's death, there can be no doubt that he lost little time in wooing Lady Grizel Leslie. Within six months they were married.

On the night of 27 October they retired to their temporary bedchamber, a small room at the top of the spiral staircase in the older part of the castle, as their new quarters in what is now Seton tower were not yet finished.

That night they both heard heavy sighs coming from outside their room, and even though Seton went out to investigate and roused a servant, no intruder was found. With the dawn, however, they discovered a startling indication of the intruder's identity. Carved upside down on the window sill in neat 3-inch (7-centimetre) high letters was the name D. LILIES DRUMMOND.

The carving, still clear and quite unworn, is over 50 feet (15 metres) from the ground in the old defensive wall of the castle, which had deliberately been built without any footholds.

Various suggestions have been put forward ever since as to a natural origin for the carving; none seems tenable. The precision of the work, the perfection of the lettering shows that however it was done it took great skill, so that any 'hoax' on the part of Seton or one of his ordinary household must be ruled out. Besides, why should the laird do something so calculated to terrify the young wife with whom he was obviously in love? And if he or someone in the castle did it, why write it upside down?

Seton was the great architect of Fyvie as it stands today, and work was probably under way at the time of his second marriage. It has been suggested that one of his masons inscribed the name out of respect for the dead mistress, but again, why do it upside down on a window sill where it could be seen only from the interior of the room? Normal commemorative plaques, usually consisting of initials and coat of arms, were carved on stone let into the surface of the wall where they could be seen. Again, the room was normally disused, far from the sumptuous new apartments Seton was then building,

and was chosen at literally the last moment. To reach the window sill, scaffolding would have to be erected – a lengthy process – and then the mason would have to climb the scaffolding and hammer out the deeply incised lettering – a noisy one. All the newly married couple heard were 'deep sighs'.

Whether natural or supernatural, the

Another of Lord Fyvie's additions to the castle was the great stone wheel staircase (below). It is on this staircase that the Green Lady, the ghost of the unhappy Dame Lilias, is sometimes seen. She is dressed in a shimmering green gown, and her appearance often heralds a death in the family. A portrait (right) that hangs in the castle is said to be of the Green Lady ghost rather than of Dame Lilias: it is dated 1676, 75 years after Dame Lilias died

mysterious 'topsy turvy' writing marked the beginning of the haunting of the staircase, and the corridors leading from it, by a luminous 'Green Ladye', as 17th-century documents call her. Naturally, it was presumed that she was Dame Lilias, although a portrait dated 1676 that hangs in the castle and is reputed to be that of the ghost bears only a slight resemblance to the portrait of Seton's first wife. It is clad in a blue-green dress, and a faint bluish iridescence seems to radiate from the enigmatic features.

The 'Green Lady' and her nocturnal rambles up and down the great wheel staircase were periodically documented over the years; each account tells of the greenish-glow that surrounded her; sometimes, indeed, she was seen simply as a flicker of light at the end of a dark corridor. Colonel Cosmo Gordon, fifth Laird of Gordon of Fyvie, who had the castle from 1847 to 1879, recorded that on one occasion he was shaken out of bed by unseen hands, and on another night a wind arose inside the castle – when all outside was quiet – and blew the bedclothes off him and his various guests: presumably Dame Lilias in a boisterous mood.

The Gordons came to Fyvie in 1733, and the apparition was seen so many times that they came to adopt the Green Lady as their own, believing that her existence was personal to them. One story told by Colonel Cosmo Gordon seems to bear this out. A lady and her maid, named Thompson, were staying for a weekend. At breakfast one morning the visitor remarked that her maid had seen a lady she did not know in a green sacque-dress going up the principal staircase.

'It must have been the Green Lady,' said the Colonel, adding rather possessively, 'though she only appears to a Gordon.'

'Oh,' exclaimed the visitor, 'I always call my maids "Thompson" as a matter of course. Her real name is Gordon!'

Just before he died, Cosmo Gordon himself saw a figure beckoning him from the shadows of a room. He took the apparition to be an omen of his own impending death. A few days later his younger brother saw the Green Lady walking towards him in the gloomy December light that shone through the inscribed window. As she reached him, she dropped him a slow curtsey. The following morning Cosmo died.

During the First World War a Canadian army officer, a Captain A., left an account of his brush with supernatural forces at Fyvie, which was one of the most impressive in the castle's annals. A mining engineer by profession, he was a complete sceptic: 'If anyone had told me before I came here that there were such things as ghosts or anything supernatural I should have looked upon that man as an arrant fool,' he said.

Illuminated pictures

On the first night of his stay he had retired to bed and fallen asleep. Some time later he woke up to find the light on, or so he thought, and got up to switch it off:

> But so doing, to my amazement I found that I had switched it on. I extinguished it once more, but the light remained. The room was illuminated from some other cause, and as I watched, the light got gradually brighter. It was like little flames playing around the pictures, and I could see the colours of the pictures quite distinctly.

The same phenomenon occurred every night until the end of his stay, and although no apparition apart from the strange light appeared, there was, said the Canadian, a feeling of 'someone or something in the room – something I wanted to hit.'

Lord Leith of Fyvie, who bought the castle in 1889 and died in 1925, had not only seen the same phenomenon but had 'had it investigated scientifically', at the same time having the 'weeping stone' examined. The latter proved to be a form of porous sandstone, which absorbed and exuded moisture by a natural process; but no 'scientific explanation' for the carving on the window sill, or the wanderings of the Green Lady and her luminescence, was forthcoming.

Since Lord Leith's death, the Green Lady has been glimpsed only periodically by visitors – the castle is not open to the public – but the enigmatic carving remains. Whatever the truth behind the stories of Fyvie Castle, Lord Leith's motto on the subject seems to have been a sound one: 'Never combat the supernatural,' he told a guest. 'Meet it without fear, and it will not trouble you.'

People fear witchcraft because they believe that it has a supernatural capacity to harm them. But does it really have the magical powers that its adherents claim? FRANK SMYTH surveys the history of witchcraft

Witchcraft –and worse

ON 9 MARCH 1967 an odd advertisement appeared in the 'Personal' columns of *The Times*: 'A witch of full powers is urgently sought to lift a 73-year-old curse and help restore the family fortunes of an afflicted nobleman. Employment genuinely offered.'

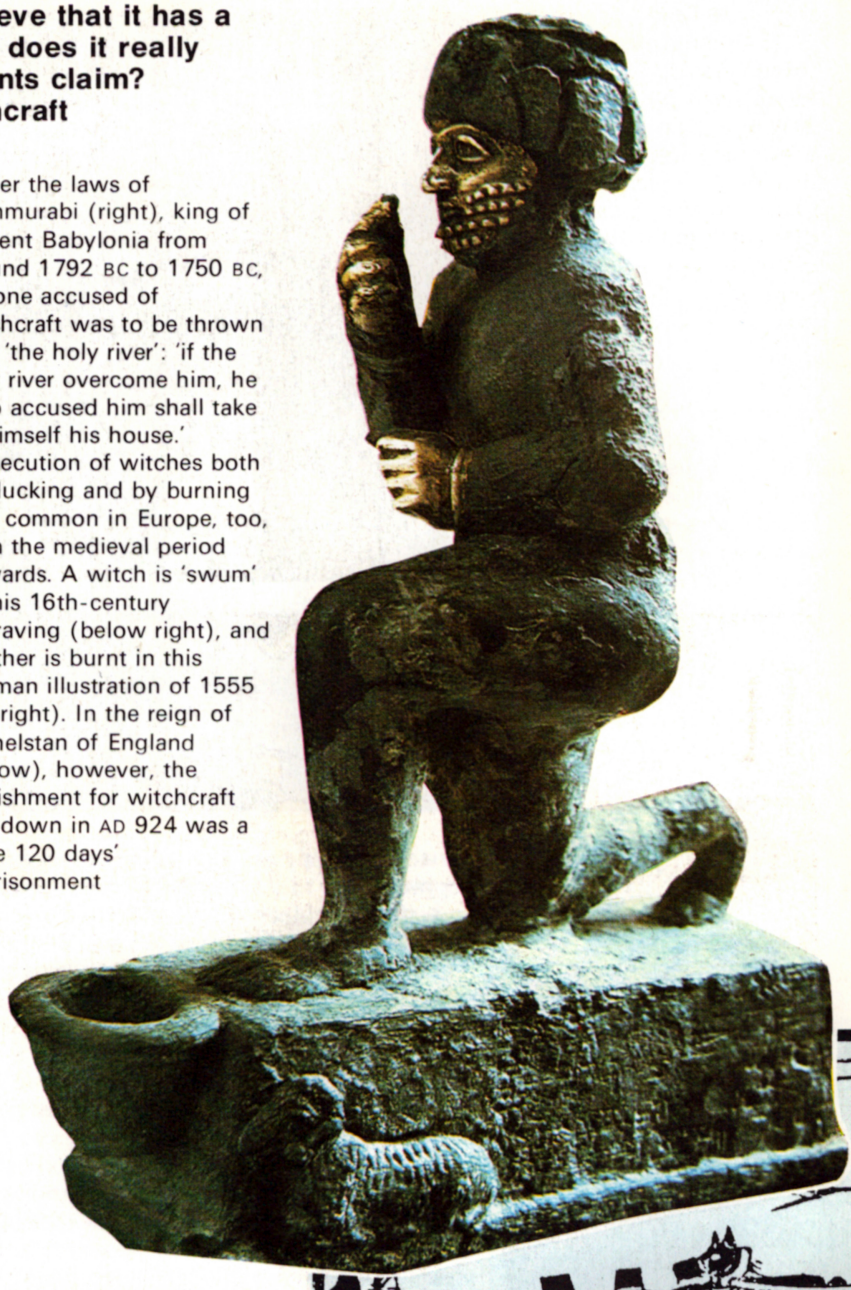
Some days later it was revealed that the advertiser was the bankrupt 74-year-old Duke of Leinster, head of one of Britain's oldest families. Over 170 people offered assistance. Whether or not witchcraft helped, the destitute duke was able to pay off his debts and was welcomed back into society before his death in the 1970s.

Some of the 'witches' who came to the ageing aristocrat's aid were followers of Gerald Gardner who invented much of modern witchcraft (see page 2821), others were members of 'independent' covens and some were lone operators; all of them believed – or apparently believed – that they were inheritors of a craft that had passed, like the carpenter's craft, from master to apprentice through the ages. Can any of their claims to magical powers be historically substantiated?

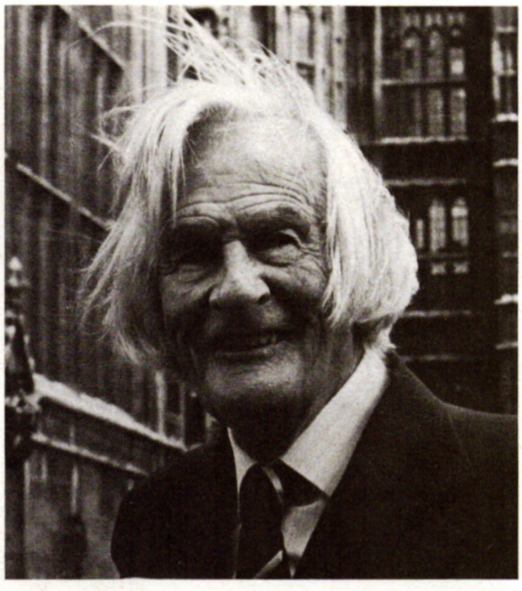
To begin with, there appears to have been no time or place on Earth where witchcraft and magic have not been practised. Man's attempt to control and come to terms with exterior natural phenomena through ritual and ceremony is an essential part of his way of thinking and behaving. The evidence of primitive sculpture and cave painting suggests the eternal preoccupation of Man with magic and its effect on fertility, rainmaking, success in hunting, the warding off of sickness and evil influences – 'modern' witches, students of Gardner, would claim these are their concerns, too. As Montague Summers put it:

> The reason why 'man came forth believing in terrors and evils' is simply that terrors and evils were there and very real and the simplicity of primitive man was sensibly conscious of their activities and of their presence all about him.

By the time of the earliest written texts on magic, the Akkadean-Chaldean inscriptions of Nineveh dating from the second millennium BC, the practice of black and white



Under the laws of Hammurabi (right), king of ancient Babylonia from around 1792 BC to 1750 BC, anyone accused of witchcraft was to be thrown into 'the holy river': 'if the holy river overcome him, he who accused him shall take to himself his house.' Persecution of witches both by ducking and by burning was common in Europe, too, from the medieval period onwards. A witch is 'swum' in this 16th-century engraving (below right), and another is burnt in this German illustration of 1555 (far right). In the reign of Aethelstan of England (below), however, the punishment for witchcraft laid down in AD 924 was a mere 120 days' imprisonment



Right: the Duke of Leinster in 1975. Events in his life had taken a decided turn for the better since 1967 when, bankrupt, he had placed an advertisement in the 'Personal' columns of *The Times* requesting the services of a witch to lift a 73-year-old curse on the family fortunes

magic had already developed into what E. M. Butler, in *Ritual magic*, termed 'an extremely elaborate and well-developed demonology', and the practices described are almost identical to those associated with European witches in the Middle Ages. One inscription reads:

> He who has fashioned images corresponding to my whole appearance has bewitched my whole appearance; he has seized the magic draught prepared for me and has soiled my garments; he has torn my garments and has mingled his magic herb with the dust of my feet. May the fire-God, the hero, turn their magic to naught.

The persecution of witches followed a familiar pattern too. Hammurabi of Nineveh, in a legal code dating from the 17th century BC, laid down that:

> If a man has laid a charge of witchcraft on another man and has not justified it, he upon whom the witchcraft charge is laid shall go to the holy river, and if the holy river overcome him, he who accused him shall take to himself his house.

The rules are rather different from 17th-century East Anglian witch-floating, but the instinct is the same.

Between Nineveh and Babylon, the Graeco-Egyptians and the Jewish authors of the *qabalah*, lies a certain continuity of magical method and belief. Love spells demanding the decapitation of white cockerels and the drinking of animal blood, for example, become commonplace, as does the gathering of herbs for potions.

The Bible describes several encounters with witches, notably that between Saul and the witch of Endor. It condemns them too in texts that were used by the medieval inquisitor to justify their own orgies of torture and burning. And wrongly too as it happens, since as early as 1584 Reginald Scot, in *Discovery of witchcraft*, had pointed out that the most famous anti-witch text of all, 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,' properly translates as 'Thou shalt not suffer poisoners to live.'

However, although the Bible takes individual practitioners of witchcraft as a matter of course, there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that it was an organised religion of the kind claimed by Gerald Gardner and his followers.

Mass necromancy

Many of the writers of ancient Greece mention witchcraft as a practical reality, with necromancy – the raising of the dead – as one of its principal aims. Aeschylus in his play *The Persians* describes the raising of Darius, while Homer in the ninth book of the *Odyssey* tells of a mass raising in gory detail.

The Romans Tacitus, Virgil, Horace, Tibullus, Livy and Pliny all describe witches as commonplace, and there is no doubt that witchcraft spread throughout the Roman Empire. After the break-up of the Empire in Britain, however, there are few literary mentions of witches, except as mild offenders against the law.

In the Saxon period, an edict was issued against those who 'practise any heathenship or in any way love witchcraft'. The penalty for such a crime was 10 half-marks: 'half to Christ, half to the King'. Under Aethelstan in AD 924, even when witchcraft had apparently been responsible for death, the punishment was only 120 days imprisonment. This was rather more lenient than the law issued by the pious King Edgar, in AD 959, who ordained death for anyone disobeying his edict that on Christian feast days 'well worshippings, and necromancies and divinations and heathen songs and devil's games be abstained from.'

Undoubtedly during this period there were still lingering traces of primitive 'heathenism' – the real 'Old Religion' of the pre-Christian era – throughout Britain. Many people clung determinedly to their old gods for several centuries after missionaries such as Aidan and Columba had begun preaching

Left: a witch doctor offers cures at a market in Bali. Throughout Indonesia witchcraft is accepted as a normal part of everyday life – in Europe, by contrast, witchcraft is generally regarded with suspicion, and the vogue enjoyed by witchcraft during the 1960s and 1970s was seen by many as threatening

Below: a detail from a 15th-century manuscript showing members of the Manichee sect engaging in heretical practices. Primitive witchcraft was often confused with heresies such as Manicheism – and both were brutally dealt with by the Roman Catholic Church

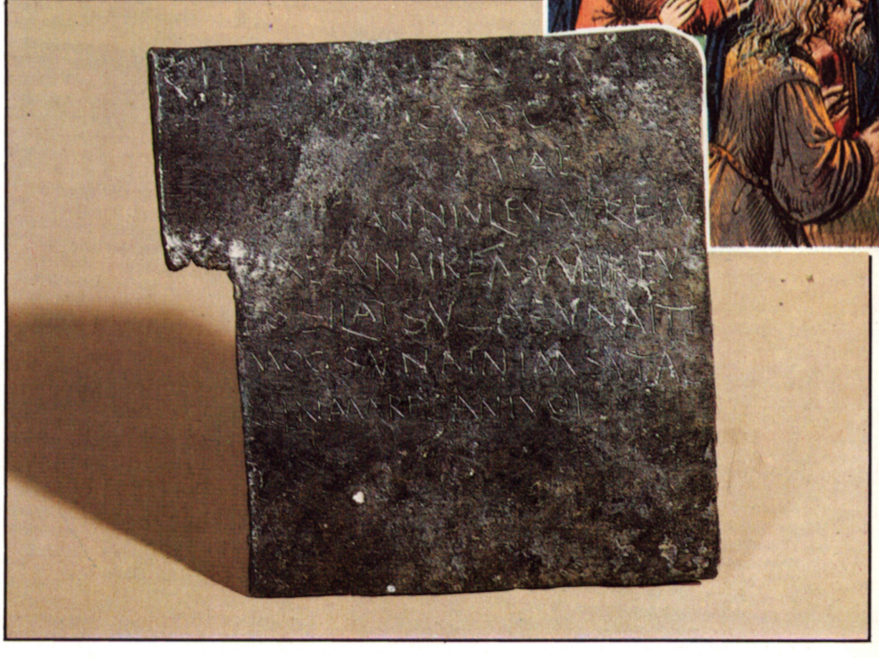
Bottom: a Roman curse scratched on a lead tablet: 'May he who carried off Sylvia from me become as liquid as water. [May] he who obscenely devours her become dumb'

the Gospel. But those who continued to worship in the old ways were not by definition practitioners of witchcraft. In late Saxon and Norman times there were indeed witches but they tended to operate alone. William the Conqueror, for instance, called one in 'to disconcert by her magic all the warlike devices of the Saxons' at the siege of Ely in 1071. She was placed on a wooden siege tower that was promptly burned down by the defenders led by Hereward the Wake.

It was not until almost 100 years later, with the founding of the Inquisition in 1163 by the Council of Tours, that the Church began to confuse primitive witchcraft with the beliefs of such heretical sects as the Cathars and the Manichees. This misplaced notion gave rise to the ideas of Satanism and group Devil-worship by 'covynes' – Old French for 'coming together' or 'conspiracy'. And so began the systematic persecution of people purported to be in cahoots with the Devil.

Why did the Church determine to stamp out the Cathars and the Manichees? The theology behind their reasoning is complex but was rooted in the idea of a 'dualism' with God on one side and the powers of evil – Satan – on the other. While the Church held that Satan was the lesser power, operating within the 'permission' granted him by God, their opponents saw God and the Devil as equals, engaged in an eternal running fight with mankind as the battle-ground.

Once the great machinery of the Inquisition got rolling there was to be no stopping it. With time it would crush the Manichees, the Waldensians, the Cathars and the Knights Templar before moving on to destroy individuals whose only crime may have been to foresee a neighbour's death in a dream. In such an environment it was unlikely that the simple witchcraft of village 'wise' men and women could survive for long



A lore unto themselves

Throughout the year, modern witches meet on nights of the full Moon, and gather to celebrate certain high days known as 'sabbats'. There are eight of these: May Eve (30 April), Hallowe'en (31 October), Candlemas (2 February), Lammas (2 August), the equinoxes (21 March and 21 September) and the solstices (21 June and 21 December).

Left: a modern coven conducts an initiation ceremony

A typical sabbat will involve all members of the coven, usually numbering between 6 and 20 people, assembling at a chosen place. Covens are strictly hierarchical, headed by the High Priestess or Priest, followed by the Witch Queen or Magus and finally the new initiates, priests and witches of the Great Goddess.

All carry brooms and lighted torches, while the High Priestess bears a model of an erect phallus. The High Priest, carrying a magic sword and a model phallus, enters the magic circle formed by the other members of the coven. There follows the five-fold kiss, with High Priest and Priestess kissing each other's feet, knees, genitals, breast and lips. The High Priestess calls on the Goddess to enter the High Priest. A ceremony of initiation of any new members follows this invocation.

The evening's entertainment may conclude with the Great Rite, in which the High Priest and Priestess have sexual intercourse, either symbolically or in reality, in front of the assembled company.

before becoming entangled with charges of heresy.

Gradually the process of trying and condemning witches became entirely divorced from ordinary law; lawyers and judges were no longer needed and, in 1398, the University of Paris opened further floodgates by decreeing that any 'superstitious practice' that had results that could not 'reasonably' be accredited to God and nature had to be the result of a pact with the Devil. That and subsequent judgements spread terror throughout Europe; witches and demons were everywhere, ready to strike down Christians, blight their crops, render them impotent and destroy their souls.

No doubt many of the accused actually believed themselves to be witches, and for every 10 innocents tortured to extract a confession of guilt there were probably an equal number who volunteered a confession, convinced that they were genuinely possessed by demons. Such a phenomenon is well known to modern police officers whenever a particularly sensational murder is committed; neither is it unknown for a spate of imitative crimes to follow shortly after a well-publicised killing. It is agreed that 'group witchcraft' was originally the invention of the Inquisition, but it is probable that in some isolated cases a strong leader could delude a group of his or her neighbours into joining a 'coven' for the thrill of it.

Undoubtedly there were, and still are, individuals with 'strange' powers. However, the traditional belief that they are the 'seventh child of a seventh child' is not so much a statement of fact as an indication of their rarity. The more down-to-earth lore associated with country witchcraft today – wart curing, the knowledge of herbs and the habits of animals – was widespread in a pre-industrial age simply because people were closer to nature; for instance, they grew up knowing about the 'magic' properties of the plants that surrounded them. Today when such skills are practised they naturally smack of the truly 'occult' – in the sense of hidden – skill.

Curiously, it was a member of the Spanish Inquisition, Alonso de Salazar Frias, who in 1611 pronounced an opinion that may well have applied not only to his own time but to the myriad 'witch' cults spawned in Britain and the United States since the 1960s. Over a period of eight weeks he talked to 1800 witches, many of whom had made voluntary confessions. His approach was astonishingly open-minded, and his conclusion salutory:

> Considering the above with all the Christian attention in my power, I have not found even indications from which to infer that a single act of witchcraft has really occurred. . . . I deduce the importance of silence, and reserve from the experience that these were neither witches nor bewitched until they were talked and written about.

Further reading

Stewart Farrar, *What witches do*, Peter Davies 1971
Gerald Gardner, *Witchcraft today*, Rider 1954
Gerald Gardner, *The meaning of witchcraft*, Aquarian 1959
Eric Maple, *Witchcraft*, Octopus 1973

Clutching at straws?

When after Edgar Vandy's death his brothers sought the help of psychics it seemed that Edgar was trying to give them new information about his drowning. COLIN GODMAN **and** LINDSAY ST CLAIRE **conclude their report**

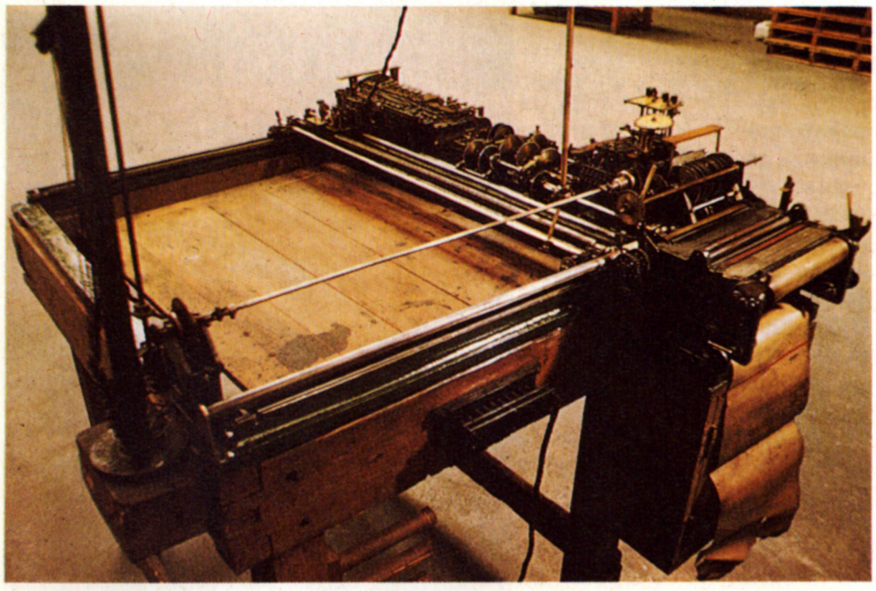
GEORGE AND HAROLD VANDY seemed to be getting somewhere in their psychic enquiry into the death of their brother Edgar on 6 August 1933. Sittings with the medium Frances Campbell had thrown some light on the drowning in a pool at Chapelwood Manor in Sussex, though the brothers were still waiting for a definitive confirmation of their suspicions that something was being hushed up. They also wanted to learn about the invention Edgar had been perfecting when he died so suddenly.

Harold Vandy's first sitting with Miss Campbell had been dominated by references to his brother's death but there had been enough allusions to bells, wires and batteries to encourage Harold. At one stage Miss Campbell had asked, 'Do you know why he is showing me wooden boards? He is trying to show me something he used to do; it is out of the ordinary and has artistic lines to it.'

Engineer Edgar Vandy (above) was on the point of perfecting a new drawing machine when he died. Dissatisfied with the verdict of the inquest, his brothers sought the help of medium Frances Campbell (above left). During a seance references were made to bells, wires, batteries and wooden boards – apparently allusions to their brother's invention, which had an electric motor

Edgar Vandy's final work was the 'Lectroline', a drawing machine that promised to do away with expensive draughtsmen. Basically it was a wooden drawing board on a base supporting a framework of arms holding pens. The movement was powered by electric motors and controlled by a programme stored on punched paper. The paper rolls resembled pianola music rolls and in this way complicated lettering, lines and decorative borders could be stored indefinitely. Once loaded with the paper, the 'Lectroline' would produce first-class artwork suitable for lithography or any similar printing process.

The London Science Museum stores



Vandy's prototype, but the first, and only, commercial model was dismantled and was later destroyed in an air-raid during the Second World War. By the summer of 1933 'Lectroline' had attracted a company of backers eager to exploit its potential. All that remained to be done was for Edgar to sort out a few operating problems.

Undoubtedly it would have been simpler if the two brothers, instead of consulting a medium, had simply gone through Edgar's bureau drawers to gain information about the 'Lectroline.' However, two factors militated against their doing so. In the first place, the finishing touches Edgar was involved in were extremely complex and his papers detailing the modifications were not complete. A medium might be able to clarify the documents. Secondly, neither George nor Harold wanted to open their brother's desk drawers; after his death they wished them to remain locked.

The prototype of Edgar Vandy's 'Lectroline' (above) is now in the Science Museum Annexe at Hayes, Middlesex. Designed to reproduce drawings automatically, it was powered by electricity and the movement of the pens was controlled by a programme stored on a roll of punched paper (visible on the right). The invention was never marketed, and at a seance the medium Naomi Bacon (played, below centre, by actress Constance Chapman in the BBC's dramatisation of the affair) said that Edgar's death had 'upset him terribly because all of his work has stopped on earth'

A man called Mac

On 8 September Harold returned for a session with Miss Campbell. She asked him: 'Did he know a man called Mac? He says Mac understands some work he is doing.' As it happened Edgar had been working with a 'Mac', a litho artist called Macnamara, on a mechanism to rule lines.

'He shows me a red light and a green light,' Miss Campbell continued. The Vandys did not know it at the time but the invention's pilot lights were indeed red and bluish-green. 'This is a fairly big thing and it has a wooden board. He presses something and I get a something rolling forward and then a click, click, click. He is not trying to write up something but he is showing me a lot of letters: A, B, C, D, and then he shows me a funny thing like a thin line. And then an arm comes up and projects about a half a dozen letters.'

To anyone with no idea how the 'Lectroline' operated this might have sounded like gibberish, but to George and Harold it was a reasonable description of the machine in action, drawing a sequence of letters.

The next step in the investigation was to try different mediums. On 15 September George saw a Mrs Mason. Through her spirit guide, called Maisie, she described a sensation of falling and drowning. Little new was said, however.

It was Harold Vandy who had one of the most extraordinary sittings. Ironically, he originally requested a different medium but she was fully booked so he had to settle for a Miss Naomi Bacon. They met on 19 October. Miss Bacon carefully tied a crêpe bandage round her eyes; then Harold handed her a roll of paper from the 'Lectroline'. Some time passed before she spoke: 'I feel very cold when I hold this,' she said. 'I am all wet and cold, I seem to be floating and in water. Someone here has drowned in water and I can't make it out at all. It was not his fault. I am seeing two people bending over him. Oh, he gives me such frightful pain.'

Harold asked where, and she indicated her left hip to right shoulder. To Harold this seemed to correspond to the post-mortem account of Edgar's injuries. It was after the sitting was technically over and Naomi was out of her trance that she gave Harold what he thought was another clue. She referred to Edgar's death as a 'complicated mistake' and added, 'Does the name Charles or Childs mean anything? I get a Chh – something, like Charles. Ch-er, Ch-ar, Shah?' Could this possibly be a reference to Nelson Charters, whom the brothers believed responsible for Edgar's death? 'If this other person who was with him had not been cowardly, it would not have happened.'

Both brothers were convinced this was a lead, one that implicated Charters and in so doing confirmed their beliefs. George sat with Naomi Bacon shortly afterwards. Again she went through the now predictable impressions of drowning and the absence of help. She then hesitantly began to try to

name her communicator. 'There is a "D" in it – Ed . . . Ed . . . Ed-gar or Ed-ward.' She made her choice: 'Edgar.'

George stared hard into the hissing gas-fire, trying to conceal his astonishment. Once he was out in the thick London fog he attempted to weigh up whether he had genuinely received a message from the dead or whether he had simply witnessed an impressive mind-reading act, albeit an unconscious one.

None of the later sittings the brothers attended revealed any new information.

Several decades on, how can the brothers' scrupulously kept notebooks be assessed? The painstaking transcripts were never published. They were hidden in a cupboard and finally handed over to the Society for Psychical Research by George in 1953.

Was fraud involved; were the brothers duped? The mediums could have been aware of George and Harold's connection with Edgar through George's initial letter to Drayton Thomas of the SPR, but the brothers believed their subsequent use of false names and addresses was adequate protection. There had been no reports of Edgar's death in the London press, though it had been reported in the local Sussex papers.

What of the possibility that the three mediums were reading the Vandys' minds? George, at least, came to be convinced of this. He believed that they had received only confirmation of their suspicions, not any new facts. There is a strong probability that this was the case. Charters was in all likelihood an innocent victim of the Vandys' suspicions. There is no reason to suppose that he did not do all he could to save Edgar. It was his failure to succeed that sent him running for help. The police were satisfied with his account, and his story did not change under cross examination from George and Harold.

Edgar's brothers George (right) and Harold (below left) continued in their attempts to contact him for almost a year after he drowned, and a sense of enduring grief for his early death was to remain with them all their lives. On the eve of his eighty-eighth birthday George wrote that he would never forget the dreadful shock of being told on the telephone that Edgar was dead, and added, 'The bitter memory of that moment has not become less bitter with the passing of time'

The accusations of cowardice and negligence, harboured by the Vandys, were probably picked up by the mediums and repeated to them in the form of messages, supposedly from the dead Edgar. It may have been telepathy at work or it may have been that psychological oddity whereby an interviewer tends to get the answers he is looking for. A multitude of involuntary and unconscious vocal and facial clues can encourage a medium, however unwittingly. Certainly, Miss Bacon did rather better at the end of her first sitting with the bandage off her eyes.

Is it possible to find the voice of the dead Edgar Vandy in any of the transcripts? Perhaps the violent nature of Edgar's death accounts for some of the confused messages the mediums were receiving – the reference to a woman, for example, whom 'no one knew was there'. Some argue that had Edgar survived he would probably have suffered from loss of memory as a result of his concussion. This amnesia, it is claimed, would explain why the mediums never managed to get a detailed description of the 'Lectroline' or a clear picture of the drowning – Edgar, the inventor and victim, had forgotten. An inspired explanation perhaps, but we will never know whether Edgar was trying to tell his brothers something important about the nature of his death. This uncertainty was to plague George Vandy until his own death nearly 50 years later.

Post script

Your letters to THE UNEXPLAINED

Dear Sir,
The holy blood and the Holy Grail is an excellent work. Philippe de Chérisey (ego) figures among the collaborators, and that is all that need be said – or at least, enough. The extensive bibliography mentions a number of works that are very difficult to obtain, bearing witness to the fact that the authors have carried their researches a long way. Permit me to congratulate you on having carried the enquiry even further [issues 123, 125, 126, 128] in consulting the work of Franck Marie and Jean-Luc Chaumeil and incorporating certain facts not included in the book.

According to your page 2516, it appears that Philippe de Chérisey, actor and writer, has lived an almost uninterrupted public life between 1961 and 1978. Nevertheless, it appears that at the same time – or at least in that period concluding in 1973 – the same person, 'forbidden to stay in Paris', illegally entered Paris to find refuge at the home of his friend M. Pierre Plantard de Saint Clair. Since, without doubt, I am Philippe de Chérisey, as borne out by the identity card issued to me by the *Préfecture de police* (no 4048503 Paris), and I live at 6 rue de Liège, where I was born in 1923, the schizoid portrait that you paint of me is very disturbing.

J. L. Chaumeil, the author of the favourable portrait, is known to me: we passed an afternoon together some years ago at Liège in Belgium. Franck Marie, the author of the bad portrait, is known to me only in that I have heard him speak at Rennes-les-Bains, on the subject of treasure. It is difficult to meet him, but if you are interested in this person you could make your enquiries at the psychiatric hospital in Villejuif (Val du Marne), where he has twice been a patient.

The reader will receive a shady impression of the said Philippe de Chérisey from your page 2516. So I request you to allow me the customary right of reply and publish this letter in your columns. If you wish, I am prepared to send you an extract from a proper legal document establishing that from 1963 (February) until 1983 (March) I have not been *interdit de séjour* (forbidden to stay) in Paris or anywhere else.
Yours faithfully,
Marquis Philippe de Chérisey Paris

We are happy to publish this letter, and to withdraw any slur that may appear to have been cast upon the career of M. de Chérisey. The extracts from the writings of Franck Marie and Jean-Luc Chaumeil were translated with care and published verbatim in good faith. We sincerely regret any disquiet that M. de Chérisey may have suffered in this matter.

Dear Sir,
I enclose negatives and prints of two photographs that I took in winter 1979. I was in a wood that was dark, with some sunlight filtering through the trees. One picture [right] was partly fogged when I opened the camera back before the film had been fully wound off. But it shows what I believe is a tiny being lying or sitting on a tree trunk and just beginning to dissolve into thin air. The other photograph is not so clear, but shows the head of a similar creature.

My family moved to this area about 1961, when I was four or five years old. From that age I have experienced frequent mysterious happenings. Because they are somewhat hard to believe, I think it unwise to give any details at present. I have grown up with knowledge of these creatures, and it has been irrelevant to me whether other people should know about them or not. But about five years ago, for my own peace of mind, I set out to capture the subjects on film. After two years I succeeded, with these pictures. The being shown is roughly 12 to 15 inches [30 to 38 centimetres] in height, with a very large head. Its arms and legs are long and thin, and the most striking thing about the creature is its large, extremely bright eyes. The beings have the ability to change colour to match their immediate surroundings, and most people must find them all but impossible to see. The creatures seem to be able to disappear or dematerialise at will.
(*Name and address supplied*)

The Unexplained *submitted both photographs to Cyril Permutt of the Bureau for the Investigation of Paranormal Photographs. He commented that he was unable to determine the nature of the images seen in the pictures, but could find no indication of anything paranormal about them. And he warned of the need to bear in mind the brain's tendency to give meaningful interpretations to random patterns of light and shade.*

Send *your* letters to THE UNEXPLAINED, Orbis House, 20–22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT.

A guide to some of the exciting new series starting soon in *The Unexplained*

Phantom footprints
At the moment when the flagship of the British Mediterranean Fleet went down in 1893, its commanding officer appeared, soaking wet and leaving damp footprints, hundreds of miles away in his house in London. Or did he? **See issue 144**

The lure of the labyrinth
From Spain to India, from Denmark to South Africa, the same spiralling maze patterns are found again and again in labyrinths built thousands of years apart. What inspired this strange similarity? **See issue 145**

Can animals think?
The faculty of reasoning, so it is said, is what sets Man apart from the rest of the animal kingdom; animals do no more than act through blind instinct, or learn through trial and error. But new evidence suggests that animals, too, can think. **See issue 146**

The real Pied Piper
The Pied Piper lured away first the rats, then the children of the small German town of Hamelin. What is the truth behind this sinister legend? **See issue 147**

A twinkle in the eye
The eyes are the mirror of the soul – but according to practitioners of iridology, or diagnosis by examination of the iris, they can also give a detailed picture of the health of a patient. **See issue 148**

The meaning of colour
To be purple with rage, browned off, to have the blues – these expressions testify to the continuing use of an ancient code of colour symbolism. **See issue 148**

Ghost witness
In the aftermath of the bloody Scottish uprising of 1745, an English soldier vanished without trace. Not an unusual event, perhaps – but his ghost returned to name his murderers. **See issue 149**

The Mizmaze near Breamore, Hampshire, England – an ancient and enigmatic design repeated over four continents

Mazes, magic and mystery